

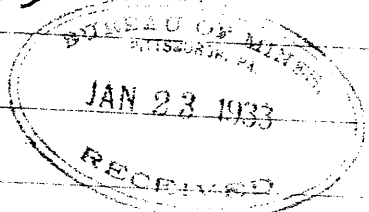


# Newspaper Accounts

Moweauqua Coal

~~1 Mr Forbes~~  
~~2 Mr Harrington~~  
~~3 Mr Forbes~~

Explosion of Dec. 24, 1932. Files  
Mowequa, Ill



**COAL'S TRAGIC COST**

(From New York Herald-Tribune)

The tragedy at Mowequa, Ill., where fifty-four coal miners lost their lives in an explosion on the day before Christmas, is just one more of those frightful "incidentals" with which modern society has to pay its fuel bill

No matter how many scientific improvements may be introduced into a coal mine, no matter how carefully the officers and employees of a mine try to avert the hazards of the pits, coal mining remains, basically, a dangerous occupation. Here and there, year after year, come these reports of disaster.

The coal that warms our homes and drives our machinery is paid ever so often, in human lives. That tragic feat is one we should never forget.

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The Patterson, (P.) Journal, Jan. 19, 1933. A MA

BUREAU OF MINES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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# Reports

December 24, 1932  
to  
January 10, 1933

PRELIMINARY REPORT  
EXPLOSION MOWEAQUA MINE,  
MOWEAQUA COAL CORPORATION,  
MOWEAQUA, SHELBY COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

December 24, 1932.

C. A. Herbert,  
Supervising Engineer,  
U. S. Bureau of Mines,  
Vincennes, Indiana.

PRELIMINARY REPORT  
EXPLOSION MOWEAQUA MINE.  
MOWEAQUA COAL CORPORATION.  
MOWEAQUA, SHELBY COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

At 8:00 o'clock the morning of December 24, a disastrous explosion occurred in the Moweaqua mine of the Moweaqua Coal Corporation, Moweaqua, Illinois, resulting in the death of fifty-four men.

There were fifty-six men in the mine at the time of the explosion; the two bottom cagers being the only ones to escape. These two men were not injured and escaped unassisted. The electrician had just gone on top for motor repair parts, thus also escaped.

The mine is owned by the Moweaqua Coal Company and had been operated by them for thirty-five or forty years. Mr. Glenn Shafer, General Manager of the Pana Coal Company, Pana, Illinois is the principal stockholder. Due to the depressed condition of the coal industry, the mine was shut down by the owners and subsequently leased by them to the present operators, The Moweaqua Coal Corporation, and is in reality a community affair started in order to give work to the citizens of Moweaqua, all of whom had either worked in the mine or were dependent upon the mine for their livelihood. All those working in the mine or connected in any way with its operation, were stockholders and had either contributed in cash or in labor, or both, towards opening the mine up.

Officials of the Company are as follows:

L. V. Brown, President, Moweaqua, Illinois.	
E. J. Hickman, Secretary,	do
J. E. Thomas, Treasurer,	"
S. S. Clapper, Legal Advisor,	"
John Heemer, Director,	"
Wm. Heriot, Mine Boss,	"
Chas. Smith, Fire Boss,	"

The mine is operating in the Number 5 bed of the Illinois Series, which is about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet in thickness and lies at a depth of 618 feet. This coal, like all coal in the Midwest, is of bituminous rank.

The immediate roof is a black slate about two feet in thickness. The main roof is a soft grey shale interspersed with many slips and joints.

The mine is developed through two shafts; a two-compartment hoisting shaft and a two-compartment air and escape shaft. The latter in addition to having a stairway, is also equipped with an emergency man cage located in the air compartment and reached at the ground landing through doors in the housing around the air shaft headframe.

The mine is worked on a room and pillar panel system.

There is a total of 104 employee stockholders, 88 of whom work underground. However, due to the fact that it does not require this number of men to produce the amount of coal that can be sold, only part of them work at one time. On the morning of the explosion, 57 men, in addition to the pit boss who was on top at the time, had reported for work.

The mine produces a maximum of 400 tons of coal per day and it is all sold to tracks for domestic consumption at Decatur and neighboring towns.

The mine had been classed as non-gaseous by the State Department of Mines and Minerals, and was operated with open lights and non-permissible equipment. It is understood however, that it is the intention of the State Department to class the mine as gaseous and require closed lights if it is reopened.

The mine is dry and it is reasonable to assume there was considerable coal dust. However, due to lack of ventilation, the only roads traveled were the intake haulage roads which were so badly caved that it was impossible to

determine what conditions were prior to the explosion.

The coal is undercut by non-permissible machines.

Haulage from the face to entry partings is by mule; from the partings to the shaft bottom by trolley locomotive.

The coal is shot with black powder and fuse by shot firers after the day shift has left the mine.

The main roads had been rock-dusted some years prior, but doubtless there was not enough left to have any effect on the propagation of the explosion.

No watering is used underground.

The mine is ventilated by a steam driven Jeffrey fan run exhausting, the hoisting shaft and main haulage roads being the intake and the air shaft the return. At the time of the explosion, approximately 35,000 cubic feet of air was passing down the hoisting shaft. Air losses were doubtless high and probably only a small percentage of this quantity was reaching the face workings.

The only sections of the mine working were the 11 and 12 west off the 16th north and the 13 and 14 east and 13 and 14 west off the 15th and 16th south. The only sections affected by the explosion were apparently, the 15th and 16th south outby the 9 and 10 panel entries; the 15th and 16th north outby the 7 and 8 west; and the west entries from the 16th north to the overcast at the 7th and 8th north.

The haulage entries including the main west, the 15th north and the 15th south, were heavily timbered and nearly all of this timber was blown out from the overcast on the main west to a point about 1,000 feet inby on both the 15th south and 15th north entries. The blowing out of this timber resulted

in extremely heavy caves, particularly on the main west parting just outby the 15th south.

At first glance it would appear that the explosion was of extreme violence, yet it is believed that it would not take a great amount of force to blow out some of the timber, and as each set was tied to the other by lagging, one going out would naturally carry others with it. It is believed therefore, that in this case appearances were deceptive and that there was not an extreme amount of violence.

It is very apparent that the explosion came out the 15th and 16th north, traveling outby on the main west and inby on the 15th and 16th south. On the 15th north however, the forces appeared to divide on the old parting between 1 and 2 east and the 3rd and 4th east, while on the parting inby the 5th and 6th east the evidence very definitely showed the forces going inby. However, due to lack of ventilation it was impossible to get into the return aircourses, nor to get beyond the parting on the 15th north where the last bodies were recovered, and as the haulage roads affected by the explosion were largely covered with heavy falls, the evidence on these roads was pretty much buried, so that until a more thorough investigation can be made, definite conclusion as to the cause of the explosion or point of origin cannot be drawn; although from the evidence thus far obtained it would appear that the explosion had its origin on the 15th north and was due to the ignition of gas by open lights, the gas coming from improperly sealed panels on the 15th north.

Very little evidence of heat was observed and the only evidence of caked coal dust observed was on the inby parting on the 15th north.

About 2:00 a.m. December 23 a coal fire at the face of No. 7 room, 12 west off 16 north, was discovered by the fire boss. This was sealed by the



building of single dirt seals. During the night of December 23, additional dirt seals were put in just outby those that were finished the previous day. These additional seals were completed about 6:00 a.m. the morning of the explosion, December 24. It was first thought that the explosion might have had its origin at this fire but from the evidence thus far observed this is not believed to be the case.

It is hoped that it will be possible to complete the investigation within the next week or ten days.

On the morning of December 24, barograph records at Decatur, Illinois, fifteen miles north of Noweagua, showed a sudden drop in barometric pressure of two tenths of an inch at 8:15 o'clock. From information obtained from the U. S. Weather Bureau, the low which caused this drop was traveling north at a rate of approximately thirty miles per hour and would thus have hit Noweagua about 7:45 a.m. - fifteen minutes before the explosion occurred.

This explosion shows the fallacy of attempting to seal off old workings containing explosive gas, with dirt seals or poorly constructed masonry seals.

Word of the explosion was first received by telegram at about 10:57 a.m. from the Pittsburgh office. The mine was immediately called by telephone to substantiate the wire and we were informed that the Illinois State rescue teams were arriving and it was not believed that rescue apparatus would be needed, but that they would call us back. In the meantime the rescue equipment was loaded up in preparation of being taken over if needed. By the time the equipment was ready, word was received that the equipment would not be needed.

Messrs. C. A. Herbert, A. U. Miller and W. R. Forbes of the Vincennes Station, proceeded at once by auto, arriving at the mine about 5:00 p.m. and assisted with the recovery operations.


Recovery work was in charge of Mr. John G. Millhouse, Director, and Peter Joyce, Assistant Director, of the State Department of Mines and Minerals.

Apparatus crews from the Benton, LaSalle, Springfield, and Duquoin, Illinois stations also crew from the Superior Coal Company, Gillespie, Illinois, assisted in restoring ventilation and in exploration work ahead of the air.

State Mine Inspectors, Flynn, Plumlee, White, Morgan, Bagwell, Weir, Marshall, Fraser, and Hodges, also assisted with the work.

Mr. Millhouse and his inspectors are to be congratulated on the able and efficient manner in which recovery work was conducted, and the highest praise is due the many able men who volunteered their services for the arduous and dangerous work in connection with the recovery work following a disaster of this kind.

Respectfully submitted,

  
C. A. Herbert,  
Supervising Engineer.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF MINES

MINE EXPLOSION

File No. 1568

Mine Moweaqua Mine Location Moweaqua, Shelby County, Ill  
Company Moweaqua Coal Corporation Mailing address Same  
Date Dec 24, 1932 Time of day 5:00 a.m. p.m. Mine working or idle working  
Total employment 104 Underground 88 Shifts worked 1 Daily production (tons) 400 mat.  
Number men killed 54 Injured 0 In mine 56  
Number men escaped unassisted 2 Rescued \_\_\_\_\_ Barricaded \_\_\_\_\_  
Type (gas or dust) gas Ignition source open lights Rock-dusted part  
Was breathing apparatus used yes Gas masks \_\_\_\_\_ Self-rescuers \_\_\_\_\_  
Time required to reach explosion area all bodies recovered by the night of Dec. 29.  
Classification (gassy or nongassy) nongassy Methane exhausted (24 hours) \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of main fans 1 Quantity air per minute 35,000  
Ventilation (continuous or split) \_\_\_\_\_ Face (line brattice or fans) \_\_\_\_\_  
Mine openings 2 shafts Principal shaft  
Coalbed number 5 Thickness 5 1/2' Volatile ratio \_\_\_\_\_ Roof shale Floor fire clay  
Mining system room and pillar Pillars extracted \_\_\_\_\_  
Room support: Main entries timber Intermediate Same Section Same  
Transportation: Main locomotive Intermediate locomotive Section mule  
Cart  
Electricity (voltage ac or dc) 250 DC Face 250 DC Portable lights lamps  
Principal mining machinery (continuous miners, conventional, etc.) conventional (cutting  
machine hand loaded)  
Was machinery permissible type no Was it permissible \_\_\_\_\_  
Blasting and explosives: Coal black powder Grading or special use \_\_\_\_\_  
Cause of explosion gas moved out of old works barometer dropping  
and ignited by open lights  
Did explosion result in fire or were fires found \_\_\_\_\_  
Point of origin 16 north  
Area affected 15 + 16 north 15 and 16 South sections (only sections working)  
Was Bureau report made yes Author(s) C. C. Hubert  
If no Bureau report, what and by whom \_\_\_\_\_  
Remarks \_\_\_\_\_

REPORT OF EXPLOSION  
MOWEAQUA MINE  
MOWEAQUA COAL CORPORATION  
MOWEAQUA, SHELBY COUNTY, ILLINOIS

December 24, 1932

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The mine starting time is 8:00 a.m. and the men were on their way in to their working places when the explosion occurred. Part of the men were riding in with the drivers and the balance in the regular man trip. The drivers left the bottom about 7:30 and the man trip about 7:45 a.m.

On the morning of the explosion there had been a sudden drop in barometric pressure, which, it is believed caused gas to flow onto the 15th north entry from inadequately sealed old workings, and <sup>the gas</sup> which was ignited by the open lights of the men proceeding into this entry with the drivers in advance of the "motor" trip.

Some rock-dusting had been done along the main west entry some years previous, but it is not believed to have had any effect in limiting the propagation of the explosion. Due to the naturally high incombustible content of the road dusts it is believed that propagation in the explosion area would not have occurred except for the high methane content due to leakage from the sealed area.

The explosion was not of extreme violence and was confined to the

